

NATE CoP

Welcome to the design team!

Thank you for agreeing to be part of the new NATE CoP. I believe that you will find the effort worth your time and will bring a new resource to all of NATE. You were invited because of your professionalism, reputation and ability to envision new ways being a Jewish educator. This document is designed to get the conversation started, but it is NOT a constitution set in stone. It is my hope that we will have a phone conference before July 15 to determine the specifics of our work together.



What is a Community of Practice (CoP)?

The font of all relevant knowledge, Wikipedia says:

A Community of Practice (CoP), according to cognitive anthropologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, is a term that describes a group of people who share an interest, a craft, and/or a profession. The group can evolve naturally because of the members' common interest in a particular domain or area, or it can be created specifically with the goal of gaining knowledge related to their field. It is through the process of sharing information and experiences with the group that the members learn from each other, and have an opportunity to develop themselves personally and professionally (Lave & Wenger 1991). CoPs can exist online, such as within discussion boards and newsgroups, or in real life, such as in a lunchroom at work, in a field setting, on a factory floor, or elsewhere in the environment.

Let's take the definition a step further for our purposes. The NATE list is a form of CoP. I propose we take it to the next level. List Servs often (and the NATE List nearly always) serve more like bulletin boards – colleagues post questions or announcements and others respond or not as they wish. It has proven to be a very useful tool to many of us.

What we are proposing is a more interactive approach, built around inquiries agreed upon by the members of the CoP. We will combine asynchronous (on our own individual schedules) and synchronous (live interactions in real time) learning and exploration of specific topics. We will use several Web 2.0 applications, conference calls and webinars for our work. We will be supported by a new online database platform called EDJE which was developed by the Lookstein Institute for Jewish Education in the Diaspora at Bar Ilan University. We will also have some funding from Lookstein through a grant from the Jim Joseph Foundation. We may choose to use those funds to invite scholars to be our teachers.

Finally, the NATE CoP is intended to create or continue the kinds of conversations that happen in the hallways at conferences, or in the corners of the room during plenary sessions.

Initial Work Plan

1. This is step one - assembling the design team. Thank you for saying yes.
I will forward everyone's names and e-mails.
2. I have set up a Ning network and will send you an invitation to that as well. (You may be aware that Ning will begin charging for networks in July. We have applied for a free network sponsored by Pearson Education. We will need to be flexible and may need to shift applications. You will also receive an invitation to the EDJE software. Please accept both invitations!
3. We will try to have a conference call by July 15. I will be at Camp Eisner beginning the 11th, so timing may be tricky. Please look for a Meeting Wizard or Tungle request from me to schedule our meeting and please respond quickly!
4. Initial meeting agenda:
 - a. Establish community norms, including membership issues, frequency of contact.
 - b. Refine and revise Goals and Design Team Tasks (see below)
 - c. Discuss our needs and those we think our colleagues have. Choose an initial course of inquiry
 - d. Discussion of technology. I suggest we keep the technology simple to begin, to address the digital divide - issues of members who do not feel comfortable with new technologies.
 - e. Discuss initial participants list
 - f. Revise this work plan
5. Goals for Participants
 - a. Professional Learning – focus on the art of being a temple educator
 - b. Help educators map their role within the synagogue. Ask the question: “How do I add new function or add functions we do not currently have?”
 - c. Design Staff and Lay Leader Development opportunities for their own synagogues
6. Design Team Tasks
 - a. Assess needs of potential participants
 - b. Establish community norms, including membership issues, frequency of contact.
 - c. Refine/revise Goals
 - d. Talk to folks on the other side of the digital divide to ask what would meet their needs.
 - e. Plan activities including webinars with experts on branding/marketing and reimagining the role of the synagogue – we need to offer great, interesting people.
 - f. Find two participants to join by October 1
 - g. Begin the conversations and learning
 - h. Roll out the CoP for the entire membership of NATE at the Seattle conference in January 2011
 - i. Repeat the process as needed!
7. Deliverables
 - a. Prepare a white paper and presentation for the Reform Jewish Educational Summit and the NATE conference, both in 2011.
 - b. Creation of documentation of the art of being an educator, possibly, creating a resource bank for CoP members
 - c. CoP Webinars and events

What Should We Discuss?

This is something we - the design team - will determine together. I have an idea I would like to start with, but we have to agree. My role is to guide and facilitate the overall process, not to be the decision maker. I only get one vote! That said, here is my idea:

The economy has brought into relief the fact that far too many Jewish families view Jewish education and temple membership as a discretionary item. Anecdotally, we know that some have “taken a year off” from school and membership to save money, rather than being willing to ask for financial relief. I do not believe the economy has altered their values, just called on them to act on them.

We need to help educators see one of their primary roles as helping parents come to the conclusion that Jewish education and synagogue membership are essential for their family’s well-being. They need to get their people to ask the question: “Why be Jewish?” and make the case for making it a central need of the family.” This makes economic sense. This makes sense in terms of Jewish values. This makes educational sense. If we are successful then all that we teach the children becomes reinforced in the home and by the participation of the parents in the temple.

Many temple educators and their lay leadership see their role as primarily or solely as running the religious school. Economic conditions make that position untenable. Not only does that expense begin to look like a luxury, but there is a vital role that few congregations fill and is tailor made for the educator – community builder. While this is certainly the role of the rabbis, more attention needs to be paid to enculturating younger parents.

I have fleshed this out a little more fully on my blog. Here is the url: <http://bit.ly/ahWjcm>

Our place in NATE

Our CoP will become part of the array of professional growth opportunities NATE provides to the membership, under the guidance of the NATE Professional Development Team.

Full Disclosure

I am a Jim Joseph Foundation Fellow at the Lookstein Institute for Jewish Education in the Diaspora at Bar Ilan University. That means my initial participation in this process is funded by them and I am in the midst of a two year course of study to learn about Communities of Practice and Web 2.0 applications.



National Association of Temple Educators
AN AFFILIATE OF THE UNION FOR REFORM JUDAISM
אגודת המחנכים ליהדות רפורמית

